



## City of Seattle Seattle Planning Commission

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Marty Curry,  
Executive Director  
Barbara E. Wilson,  
Analyst

July 21, 2004

Councilmember Richard Conlin, Chair Viaduct COW  
City Hall, 600 Fourth Avenue  
P.O. Box 94749  
Seattle, WA 98124-4749

Dear Councilmember Conlin;

Thank you for the thoughtful leadership you have shown on this important project. We offer our assistance in making sure that the final decision on the Alaskan Way Viaduct is the right one for Seattle and the region. We welcome the opportunity to present our position on a preferred alternative and to make additional recommendations that we hope will further enhance both the project and the feasibility of the project funding.

### **Planning Commission Position**

**The Seattle Planning Commission recommends a Full Tunnel Alternative be selected and further developed as the preferred alternative. We believe this alternative, more than any other, will have a positive effect on the regional transportation system, strengthen the regional and local economy, enhance the environmental quality of Elliott Bay, and improve the character of Seattle's Central Waterfront and Center City community.**

The Alaskan Way Viaduct Project is one of the most important transportation and community infrastructure projects in Seattle's history. The Planning Commission shares your conviction that this is a once in a lifetime opportunity and has thus viewed it from a long-term and broad perspective. As you have noted, the Nisqually Earthquake has provided an **opportunity to shape the future of Seattle's waterfront and improve how our transportation systems work efficiently with one another.**

**The Planning Commission's criteria in examining the AWV alternatives are that the preferred alternative will;**

- Have a positive influence on the character of the area between the waterfront and adjacent neighborhoods
- Maintain the health of an economically diverse waterfront
- Have a positive impact on the transportation network – including access to downtown; freight mobility to key industrial destinations; support of the multimodal transportation system
- Maximize ability to leverage funding to build the alternative as proposed
- Stand the test of time – in 50 years this infrastructure investment will be seen as the wise choice that has resulted in balanced use of the waterfront and in maintaining an effective transportation system.

The Planning Commission is particularly interested in ensuring that there is a clear, understandable process by which the decision and design refinement will be accomplished. We believe it is important for all stakeholders to have a clear picture of how the City will work with the State to fund and construct the project. At this point it appears to us that the following strategies will be important to the City as it builds a case for this crucial investment.

**Suggestions and Recommendations:**

▪ **Economic Analysis**

Since this corridor has been identified as having an important effect on the regional, state and national economy, more specific economic analysis will be critically important in the City's rationale for both Seattle's public investment for this project as well as investment by the State of Washington and the Federal government. The Planning Commission recommends the City push for and participate in more detailed examination of economic impacts to the waterfront and adjacent areas as well as the industrial and commercial areas affected by the north and south segments of the AWW project. We believe this study will bolster the argument for the expenditure of the preferred alternative.

▪ **Recommend Consideration of Construction Period and Impacts**

The duration and magnitude of the construction impacts as proposed in the DEIS are immense to the community and the City. **We urge the City to call for and participate in considering a broader set of alternative construction scenarios.** This should include exploring cost savings that could be accrued by considering ways to shorten the construction period and costs by looking at an alternative location for one of the tunnels or by closing the Viaduct and living without its capacity during construction.

▪ **Define Core Elements of the Preferred Alternative**

The Planning Commission urges that the City view the current range of alternatives as what they are – somewhat artificial alternatives that meet the needs of an environmental assessment. **We urge you to form the best overall package, pulling features from among the alternatives where needed, and to clearly identify core elements and features of the project are non-negotiable.** It is possible that cost estimates will change as more definitive information is available. Therefore, it is imperative that the City not lose critical project elements as features of the preferred alternative are shaved off to save money.

▪ **Maintain flexibility in Decision-Making Process**

In light of the present level of analysis, it is possible that supplemental EIS information and evaluations will be requested. We strongly urge you to make sure this additional information and analysis provides all the information you need to negotiate the final decision. The Commission urges the City to use any future analysis as an opportunity to clearly identify the broader impacts and aspects of this project on the downtown community and economy.

The Planning Commission acknowledges the complexity of this project and the process of selecting a preferred alternative when so much is speculative at this point. While we recognize the immense amount of work that has gone into the Draft EIS, we encourage you to refer to the Planning Commission and Design Commission DEIS **comments in which we made specific suggestions about the additional information and analysis that should be considered when making these critical decisions.**

However, we believe there is adequate information for offering a recommendation and have based this recommendation on the Commissions expertise and analysis of this project to date. We recognize the need to move forward with a common direction in order to garner the resources and support that are essential to shaping and carrying out the project.

As always, we are happy to be at your service in putting the expertise and resources of the Planning Commission to work in these crucial growth issues that will determine the health and vibrancy of the city, the region and the state. We look forward to continuing to assist your office with any further review and evaluation of the Alaskan Way Viaduct Project as it moves forward.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "George Blomberg". The signature is fluid and cursive, with a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

George Blomberg  
Chair

CC:  
Seattle City Council  
Maureen Sullivan, WSDOT  
Tom Madden, WSDOT  
Grace Crunican, SDOT  
Bob Chandler, SDOT  
Steve Pearce, SDOT  
Diane Sugimura, DPD  
John Rahaim, DPD  
Seattle Design Commission

Attachments: **Seattle Planning Commission Talking Points on other AWV alternatives**

### **Seattle Planning Commission Talking Points on other AWV alternatives**

While the Planning Commission recognizes that a complete and thorough understanding of the project may continue to evolve, it has the following comments to offer on the other alternatives (as well as a speculative yet emerging scenario), based on the information available.

1. **Tunnel Bypass alternative** – The Commission believes this alternative could become a fall back if there is less funding than is needed for the full tunnel as it seems to be the same as the 1<sup>st</sup> phase of the full tunnel alternative. However, further analysis is needed with regards to downtown access and impacts to surface traffic and the pedestrian environment.
2. **Rebuild alternative** – The Commission does not place as strong a value on views derived while driving on the Viaduct as those who see this as sufficient reason to replace the existing structure. Instead the Commission urges the State and the City of Seattle to prioritize the views from many more points in downtown Seattle that will be enhanced by eliminating the aerial structure of the current AWV. The Commission believes that this option does not meet its criteria that the project should enhance the character of the area between the waterfront and adjacent neighborhoods, nor does it provide the best opportunity for community development opportunities
3. **Aerial alternative** – The Planning Commission does not support an aerial alternative for the same reason it does not support the rebuild option.
4. **Surface alternative** – The Planning Commission does not support a surface alternative. While it is not completely satisfied by the analysis done in the EIS, the Commission believes that this alternative is likely to have such a devastating impact on the pedestrian environment that it holds little merit for further consideration.
5. **No action alternative** – The threat of a seawall failure or the collapse of the Viaduct makes this alternative severely flawed and unrealistic for further consideration.
6. **The ‘no-highway’ alternative** – The Planning Commission has only conducted a cursory analysis of this emerging concept and recognizes that very little study and analysis has been done on this ‘alternative’. While we take no position on this alternative at this time the Commission is concerned with some potential negative impacts of this concept: 1) The Planning Commission is concerned about the impacts of this alternative on the quality of the pedestrian environment in the downtown and center city area, based on its support for improving the pedestrian environment and enhancing the quality of life in the urban core. The no-highway alternative raises serious questions about the livability of the urban core and the likely negative impacts to the pedestrian environment in emerging residential communities in downtown Seattle caused by increased through traffic on surface streets; 2) The Commission is apprehensive about the financial viability of this concept and believes the practical considerations of funding need to be taken into account. The Commission is particularly concerned that state and federal funding for the project will be compromised under this option, leaving the City and its residents with bulk of the financial responsibility.

